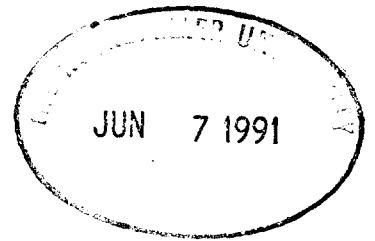


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[still Wednesdays only]



↓
ROBERT K. MERTON

5 June 1991

Dear Gene,

I've just read Part 4 of your invariably interesting commentary on "The Most-Cited Papers of All Time, SCI 1945-1988" and two, quite distinct thoughts come to mind.

The first is that the absolute number of citations is in part a function of the number of scientists in the given field, the number of readers of the particular journal, &c. &c., This you have pointed out from time to time in discussing 'impact' but it still bears repetition for many of your readers. Comparing the absolute numbers of citations in chemistry and, say, sociology would of course be comparing incomparables (or, if you will, incommensurables). What is needed to allow for approximate comparisons between numbers of citations in disciplines or subfields of greatly differing size is a standardized coefficient. Is this feasible?

The second vagrant thought may amuse you: it involves the joint operation of two patterned phenomena which have been of special interest to me since I identified them a good many years ago. These are OBI (obliteration by incorporation) and self-exemplifying ideas and findings in science and learning. As often before, you refer to "obliteration" in the Introduction to your Part 4 piece. But this time, as I believe never before, you no longer cite my identification of the phenomenon, thus providing an example of OBI in the course of referring to OBI. Thus, this one short passage also provides an example of a self-exemplifying idea. (I send along some snippets on 'self-exemplification.') Fun?

Josh wrote Harriet and me recently asking if we knew of any evidence on the reluctance of journal editors to publish "negative findings." All I have on tap are a handful of references to studies of this provided in the piece by Domenic V. Cicchetti, "The reliability of peer review for manuscript and grant submissions: A cross-disciplinary investigation," BEHAVIORAL & BRAIN SCIENCES, 1991, 14, 119-186, at 129, 162.

Hope to see you soon.

Dr. Eugene Garfield
Institute for Scientific Information

Yours,

RG

Josh,
slim
pickings

but all I
can summon
up at this
time.

When do we
manage to get
together?

RG